

VZCZCXRO8312  
OO RUEHBZ RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUCNDT #1203/01 3551809  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 211809Z DEC 07  
FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3405  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1776  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1967  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 8404

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 USUN NEW YORK 001203

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UNSC](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: SYG BAN CONVENES FIRST GROUP OF FRIENDS MEETING

REF: SECSTATE 168400

11. (SBU) Summary: UN Secretary-General Ban convened the first meeting of the Group of Friends on Burma December 19. Participants included the P-5, Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Singapore, Portugal, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as UN Under-Secretary for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe and UN Special Adviser on Burma Ibrahim Gambari. During the meeting, Ban called for patience but stressed that Gambari's efforts must also yield results. He recommended that the Group of Friends be "consultative in nature." Gambari called on the regime to release or relax restrictions for Aung Sun Suu Kyi (ASSK) to allow her to participate in dialogue.

12. (SBU) (Summary cont.) Participants echoed familiar national positions. The EU announced a pledge of USD 740,000 to support Gambari's mission, including additional staffing. In his concluding summary of the group's discussion, Gambari expressed appreciation for broad support for his mandate and asked the group to identify proposals for discussion among the Group of Friends on the way forward in Burma. Gambari rebuffed an Indonesian request, supported by China, for a Burmese presence in the Group of Friends, offering instead that, by invitation, a Burmese representative could on occasion address the group. In closing, Gambari echoed Ban's statement that to achieve results the international community must demonstrate unity of purpose. End Summary.

-----  
UN Lead  
-----

13. (SBU) Ban, with Gambari by his side, chaired a free-wheeling discussion during the December 19 inaugural meeting of the Group of Friends on Burma. Ban stressed that the good offices mission is part of a process that requires patience but must also yield results. He asked that the Group of Friends be "consultative in nature" and facilitate Burma's path into the international community instead of isolating the country. Gambari stated baldly that the regime must release or relax restrictions for Aung Sun Suu Kyi (ASSK) to allow her to participate in dialogue. He also said the regime must release all those detained, broaden the National Convention, open the Constitutional Drafting Committee, and address the socioeconomic issues in the country. Both Ban and Gambari underscored the utility of "unity of purpose." Gambari rebuffed an Indonesian effort supported by China to include Burma in the Group.

---  
P-5  
---

14. (SBU) Ambassador Khalilzad pointed out that the regime had made little progress on basic requests outlined in the October 11 Security Council Presidential Statement. It is clear the regime is backsliding and momentum is flagging, he said. He suggested that a discussion on the consequences of lack of progress will be as important as talk of incentives, as the Group of Friends works together to energize the effort and maintain momentum for change in Burma. UK PR Sawers emphasized that change in Burma would generate benefits, which should be made clear to Burmese authorities, but that there were "conditions" and there would be "no reward for token steps." French PR Ripert stressed the need for a concrete debate on specific proposals, and requested more information on the proposed Poverty Alleviation Commission. Russian DPR Dolgov offered support for the group "as long as the group is helpful." He cautioned against placing too many conditions on the Burmese and urged the group to focus on engagement rather than punishment. Dolgov admitted, however, that the pace was "not satisfactory" and the "regularity (for progress) was not there." China, represented by its political coordinator Li Junhua, reaffirmed China's commitment to Gambari and the good offices mission, and offered China's assistance to Gambari during his upcoming visit "in early January." Li requested Burma's representation in the group to ensure the forum served as a "group of friends." He also pressed for "engagement instead of punishment" of Burma, and raised the complexity of the situation and the regime's four-decade isolation.

-----  
ASEAN  
-----

15. (SBU) On behalf of ASEAN, Singapore PR Menon reiterated

USUN NEW Y 00001203 002 OF 002

Burma's request to "deal with the UN above anyone else." He commented that the group should not make demands to complicate the issue but should offer realistic targets. He repeated previous statements that Gambari and his good offices mission is the "only game in town." Indonesian PR Natalegawa requested that the UN invite a Burmese representative to the group, reasoning that the group represented a wide spectrum of countries and that its purpose was to support Burma on its path to national reconciliation. Vietnamese PR Minh advocated for a long-term, comprehensive approach, which required patience in "bringing Burma back to the fold." The people of Burma are ultimately responsible for the future of Burma, he said. Thai PR Pramudwinai commented that a Burmese representative would have his "eyes open with glee" to see the broad support generated by the Group of Friends. As a neighbor, he also stressed the importance of patience and perseverance in dealing with Burma.

-----  
Other Members of the Group  
-----

16. (SBU) On behalf of the EU, Portuguese PR Salgueiro pledged USD 740,000 for additional staffing for Gambari and the good offices mission. Japanese PR Takasu remarked that the UN must coordinate carefully among the many UN efforts in Burma.

He welcomed frequent visits by Gambari and stressed that bilateral efforts with Burma should be coordinated with the good offices mission. Indian PR Sen said that India has pushed the Burmese at the highest levels for national reconciliation and progress. He offered Indian support for the "carrot and stick" approach and emphasized the Poverty Alleviation Commission as an important tool for change in Burma. PR Sen added, however, that international financial institutions were not in a good position to offer incentives since "they were responsible for the fuel crisis" but the idea was good, he added. PR Sen also drew a parallel between ASSK and Ghandi, commenting that Ghandi was able to participate fully in dialogue while under restrictions and implying that ASSK was in a similar situation. We should

continue to press for reform even if restrictions on ASSK are not lifted, he continued. (Note: In a subsequent discussion Indian Political Counselor told USUN expert that the Government of India believed ASSK must be released to participate fully in dialogue. PR Sen had "gone off the cuff," he said, and misrepresented India's position.) Australian and Norwegian PRs also delivered supportive remarks.

17. Comment. The first meeting of the Group of Friends was generally uneventful. Secretary-General Ban's participation made clear the level of importance imparted to the group by the UN. It also gave SYG Ban and Gambari the opportunity to outline UN expectations for the group. In the discussion that followed, however, each member broadly supported Gambari and the good offices mission and repeated well-established national positions. There was little interaction and no dialogue. Both SYG Ban and Gambari requested active participation as well as proposals for consideration in upcoming meetings. If members engage in the informal dialogue proposed by Ban, this will be a good opportunity to explore next steps for progress in Burma.  
Khalilzad